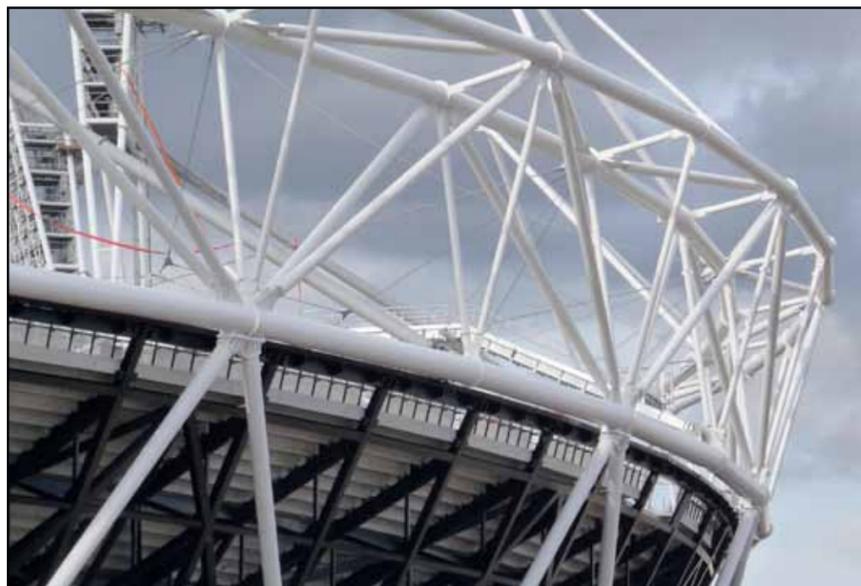


5. this sporting life

A sporting city to rival anywhere in the world, London – home of the 2012 Olympics – takes the physical battle very seriously indeed. Its 32 boroughs are home to 14 professional football clubs, watched by hundreds of thousands of people each week, as well as two test cricketing counties and countless other teams across a variety of disciplines. Its stadiums and complexes, spread out over the city to serve its distinct communities, host everyone from world-famous brands to local athletics clubs and amateur teams. And wherever you go in the city (and on this marathon journey, you'll visit much of it), you will see goalposts, basketball nets or racing tracks set up for the next generation of sportsmen and women to hone their talent. The Olympic torch couldn't have come to a more appropriate place.



Start point: Southfields tube

End point: St John's Wood tube

Duration: 7.5 hours

● Come out of **Southfields tube**, cross the road and turn right down Wimbledon Park Road. Catch the southbound **493** and get off at the **Wimbledon Tennis Club & Museum** stop for **The All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club**. This club has hosted the Wimbledon Championships, the world's oldest and most prestigious tennis tournament, since 1877. Though it's now a mega complex comprising two stadium-like show courts, 17 tournament courts and hi-tech facilities, it is still a bastion of tradition. Sponsorship and advertising are conspicuous by their absence, players must wear white on court, and the occupants of Centre Court's Royal Box are always bowed or curtsied to. The club also hosted the tennis competition in the London 2012 Olympics.

● Walk back up Church Road and turn left into Victoria Drive. Catch the northbound **39** from the **Church Road** stop to **Putney/St Mary's Church**, which is situated on **Putney Bridge** – the starting point for the annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race. Continue walking over the bridge and take a short ride on the northbound **74, 220** or **430** from the **Putney Bridge/Gonville Road** stop on the other side of the river.

● Get off the bus at the **Bishops Park Road** stop and continue walking up Fulham Palace Road, then turn left into Finlay Street. **Fulham FC's**

Craven Cottage stadium is situated at the other end. This charming, late 19th-century construction is the work of Scottish architect Archibald Leitch, who designed the cottage pavilion that gives the ground its name, and has been designated a Grade II-listed building. One of London's six (at the time of writing) Premier League football clubs, Fulham FC may not be as illustrious as its near-neighbours Chelsea, or the North London giants Arsenal and Spurs, but it can boast perhaps the loveliest ground in the sport – plus one of the game's most eccentric owners in ex-Harrold's boss Mohammed Al Fayed.

● Turn right at the ground and walk along the back of the Johnny Haynes Stand – named after the ex-Fulham player and England captain – and catch the westbound **424** from the **Stevenage Road/Fulham Football Club** stop. This route is only operational from Monday to Saturday, so if you're doing this journey on a Sunday, retrace your steps down Fulham Palace Road and catch the westbound **414** from the **Fulham High Street** stop instead. Get off at **Fulham Broadway** and take the westbound **211** from the same stop. Almost immediately, the bus passes **Chelsea FC's Stamford Bridge** stadium on the left. This glitzy construction – which incorporates shops, restaurants, bars and a hotel – started life as another Archibald Leitch construction in 1877, but now reflects the club's Premier League and European success in recent years.

● Get off the bus at the **Victoria Station/Grosvenor Gardens** stop and cross over to the

other side of Buckingham Palace Road. Continue along the road and turn right into Victoria Street. After a few minutes, turn right down Vauxhall Bridge Road and catch the southbound **36, 185** or **436** from the **Neathouse Place** stop. All buses cross the River Thames and pass **The Oval** cricket ground on the left. Home of Surrey County Cricket Club, the stadium – which dates back to 1845 – hosts the final match of England’s summer test series each year. It was also the venue for the world’s first-ever international football match (a 1-1 draw between England and Scotland in 1870), as well as being the home of the FA Cup Final from 1872 to 1892.

● Get off the bus at the **Oval Station** stop, cross the road and catch the northbound **36** up to **Hyde Park Corner**. Continue on foot up Duke of Wellington Place and cross over Knightsbridge so that you’re on the same side of the road as **Hyde Park** – venue for the triathlon and open-water swimming events at the London 2012 Olympics. Turn left and walk down the road for a minute or so, then catch the northbound **19** from the **Hyde Park Corner Station** stop up to **Museum Street**.

● Take the eastbound **25** from the same stop all the way to **Stratford Bus Station**, passing the **Olympic Stadium** – constructed for the 2012 games – and the **Olympic Park**, which houses many venues built especially for 2012, including the **Aquatics Centre** and **London Velopark**. The whole park is towered over by the 115-metre, helter skelter-like *Orbit*, which is the largest piece of public art in the UK.

● Take the northbound **308** from **Stratford Bus Station** to the **Homerton High Street/Hackney Hospital** stop facing Glyn Road. Though this journey is not a pretty one, it is a reminder why this area – one of the poorest districts in the country and in desperate need of investment – was chosen as the setting for the 2012 Olympics. En route, you will pass the northern part of the **Olympic Park** and **Hackney Marshes** – home to more than 80 football pitches, and the heart of London’s amateur football scene.

● Catch the northbound **236** from the same stop all the way to **Finsbury Park Station**. Just after the bus passes Highbury Fields, look to the left for a view of **Highbury stadium**, the former home of Arsenal FC. Now a complex of luxury flats, the Art Deco ground was originally designed by Archibald Leitch in 1913, but significantly developed during the 1930s. As well as being Arsenal’s home until 2006, the stadium also played host to several other sports – including a 1966 World Heavyweight boxing title fight between Henry Cooper and Muhammad Ali.

● When the bus terminates at **Finsbury Park Station**, walk down the tunnel marked London

Underground. At the other end, turn right and, once outside, catch the westbound **210**. As the bus heads towards Archway tube, you can catch glimpses of **Arsenal FC’s Emirates Stadium** – the Premier League club’s enormous, futuristic new home – on the left. But the best views are as the bus climbs Highgate Hill. After passing through Golders Green, the 210 turns left onto Highfield Avenue, which provides the first sight of **Wembley Stadium**. This 90,000-capacity arena – Europe’s second-largest – is the home of the national football team, as well as the venue for all of the sport’s major cup finals. It also hosts rugby, American football and other sporting events.

● When the bus route ends at **Brent Cross Shopping Centre**, continue around the bus station and catch the southbound **189** down to **St John’s Wood Road/Lord’s Cricket Ground**. Once you get off, continue walking down Grove End Road and turn left into St John’s Wood Road, passing **Lord’s**, the famous cricket arena that has stood on this site since 1814. Home of the Marylebone Cricket Club – which established the rules of modern cricket in the 18th century – the stadium is also the base of Middlesex County Cricket Club, and is used by the English national side for the first match in its home test series every summer. A stunning combination of Victorian and cutting-edge modern architecture, it is undoubtedly the most famous cricket ground in the world and a fitting place to end your journey around London’s sporting landmarks. **The Lord’s Tavern** on St John’s Wood Road is a good place to stop for a celebratory drink.

